

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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DHA-02 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-03 PRS-01 CIAE-00

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R 241325Z NOV 75

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3686

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0955

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJECT: RELEASE OF ATO MESFUN HAILU

REF: ASMARA 0926

1. ON MORNING OF NOV. 22, CONGEN SENIOR LOCAL EMPLOYEE, ATO MESFUN HAILU, WAS BROUGHT FROM PALACE IN ASMARA TO BG GETACHEW, MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR, AND AFTER A STERN WARNING WAS RELEASED FROM PRISON AFTER 18 DAYS DETENTION. MESFUN REPORTS THAT THE ORIGINAL REASON FOR HIS DETENTION WAS BG GETACHEW'S OUTRAGE AT CONGENS REQUEST FOR AN APPOINTMENT FOR MESFUN WITH GETACHEW, WHICH HE CONSTRUED AS FOREIGN INTERVENTION. ON DAY OF HIS ARREST (NOV 5) MESFUN WAS REQUIRED TO WAIT THREE HOURS BEFORE SEEING THE GENERAL. WHEN GRANTED INTERVIEW, HE WAS SUBJECTED TO A 5-MINUTE HARANGUE ON THE IMPROPRIETY OF THE CONGEN INTERVENING ON HIS BEHALF. GETACHEW'S RAGE WAS SUCH THAT HIS ACCUSATIONS AGAINST MESFUN SEEMED TOTALLY IRRATIONAL, MAKING SUCH STATEMENTS AS "WHAT DO YOU THINK THE AMERICANS CAN DO AGAINST ME?" AND "I AM GOING TO CHARGE YOU WITH SELLING YOUR COUNTRY'S SECRETS TO THE AMERICANS."

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2. AFTER THIS TIRADE, MESFUN WAS LED AWAY TO PALACE

WHERE, DURING HIS DETENTION, HE WAS INTERROGATED ONLY TWICE, WITH INVESTIGATORS IMMEDIATELY REALIZING THAT CHARGES AGAINST HIM WERE RESULT OF GETACHEW'S PIQUE, AND OTHERWISE WITHOUT SUBSTANCE. MESFUN WAS NOT MISTREATED DURING HIS DETENTION, AND HE HAD OPPORTUNITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH HIS DETAINED WIFE, ABEBA TESFAGIORGHIS. HIS WIFE IS IN GOOD HEALTH, ALTHOUGH SHE IS STILL BEING HELD ON APPARENTLY UNFOUNDED CHARGES OF BEING CONDUIT FOR FUNDS TO INSURGENTS. PRISON AUTHORITIES SAY THAT SHE WILL NOT BE RELEASED UNTIL SHE ADMITS HER GUILT, WHICH SHE IS NOT PREPARED TO DO.

3. UPON BEING RELEASED, MESFUN WAS AGAIN SUBJECTED TO GETACHEW'S ANGER AND SEVERELY WARNED THAT SHOULD HE BECOME INVOLVED WITH THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES AGAIN, HE WILL BE ARRESTED AND HELD INDEFINITELY. THE CONGEN CONSIDERS IT PRUDENT NOT TO EXPOSE MESFUN TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES FOR AT LEAST SEVERAL WEEKS; OTHERWISE, HOWEVER, WE EXPECT HIM TO RESUME HIS NORMAL FUNCTIONS AS ECON/ COMMERCIAL ASSISTANT. CONGEN IS ALSO CONCERNED THAT INFORMATION CONCERNING GETACHEW'S BEHAVIOR BE CLOSELY HELD, AS SHOULD THIS BE RELEASED, MESFUN'S FREEDOM WOULD AGAIN BE JEOPARDIZED.

4. COMMENT: CONGEN IS TAKEN ABACK BY BG GETACHEW'S HOSTILE REMARKS CONCERNING AMERICANS, NOT ONLY AS USG IS PRINCIPAL SUPPLIER OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO EPMG, BUT ALSO AS CONGEN'S RELATIONS WITH GETACHEW HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CORDIAL, IF NOT ENTIRELY SATISFACTORY ON THE SUBSTANTIVE LEVEL.
SHERRY

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